



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**APPLICATION OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS) IN
SOIL EROSION PREDICTION: A CASE STUDY OF THE SG. WENG
EXPERIMENTAL WATERSHEDS**

ALBERT TAN THEAN WEI

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By

ALBERT TAN THEAN WEI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master Science**

August 2002



**Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science**

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August 2002

Chairman: Associate Professor Lai Food See, Ph.D.

Faculty: Forestry

A study was carried out to assess soil erosion under natural forest in watershed using the Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) model within a Geographic Information System (GIS) environment. The Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed, located within Hulu Muda Forest Reserve, Kedah, Malaysia was chosen for this study. The study area comprised four watersheds namely Watershed 1 (2.6 sq. km), Watershed 2 (8.4 sq. km), Watershed 3 (7.6 sq. km) and Watershed 5 (42.1 sq. km).

The USLE model consists of five factors namely rainfall erosivity (R), soil erodibility (K), length slope (LS), crop management (C) and support practice (P) factors. The R factor was obtained based on four methods namely Morgan (1974), Balamurugan (1990), Roose (1977) and rainfall equal or exceeding 25 mm/hr (this study). Using a regular grid of Digital Elevation Model (DEM), a method based on the maximum downhill slope and cumulative slope length was used for calculating the LS factor. K factor was obtained from Department of Agriculture, Kedah based

on five soil series. The C and P were combined into a single factor called vegetation management (VM). The values obtained for each parameter were later converted to raster layers for modeling the soil erosion.

Rates of erosion were found to be less than 1 t/ha/yr for most of the area in the study watersheds. Soil erosion rates ranged from 0 to 2.255 t/ha/yr in W1, 0 to 3.127 t/ha/yr in W2, 0 to 5.233 t/ha/yr in W3 and 0 to 4.118 t/ha/yr in W5. The LS and R factors were the major ones influencing soil erosion rates. The results obtained were comparable to measured soil loss from erosion plots and also predicted soil loss from USLE in other studies under similar conditions. Most studies have shown that erosion seldom exceeds 1 t/ha/yr under forest conditions.

This study showed that soil erosion rates can be calculated using USLE within a GIS environment. The use of GIS has facilitated the manual measurements of slope and slope length on topographic maps with automated procedures based on the use of DEMs. This has reduced significantly the time spent in analysis while at the same time gave some degree of accuracy needed for soil erosion prediction. The successful integration of USLE and GIS should be of tremendous use for studies that require simple and accurate soil erosion assessment.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat University Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**APPLIKASI SISTEM MAKLUMAT GEOGRAFIK (GIS) DALAM
MERAMAL HAKISAN TANAH: SATU KAJIAN KES DI KAWASAN
TADAHAN AIR SG. WENG**

Oleh

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Satu kajian telah dijalankan untuk menilai hakisan tanah bagi hutan di kawasan tadahan air menggunakan model *Universal Soil Loss Equation* (USLE) di dalam perselantaran Sistem Maklumat Geografik (GIS). Kawasan Tadahan Air Sg. Weng yang terletak di Hutan Simpan Hulu Muda, Kedah, Malaysia telah dipilih sebagai kawasan kajian. Kawasan kajian ini terdiri daripada empat kawasan tadahan air iaitu Kawasan Tadahan Air 1 (2.6 km persegi), Kawasan Tadahan Air 2 (8.4 km persegi), Kawasan Tadahan Air 3 (7.6 km persegi) dan Kawasan Tadahan Air 5 (42.1 km persegi).

Model USLE terdiri daripada lima faktor iaitu *rainfall erosivity* (R), *soil erodibility* (K), *length slope* (LS), *crop management* (C) and *support practice* (P). Faktor R dikira berdasarkan empat kaedah iaitu Morgan (1974), Balamurugan (1990), Roose (1977) dan hujan yang sama atau melebihi 25 mm/hr (kajian ini). Dengan menggunakan *Digital Elevation Model* (DEM), satu kaedah berdasarkan cerun maximum dan panjang cerun kumulatif digunakan untuk mengira faktor LS.

K yang berdasarkan kepada 5 jenis tanah, didapati daripada Jabatan Pertanian Kedah. C dan P pula digabungkan kepada satu faktor iaitu *vegetation management* (VM). Nilai yang didapati bagi setiap faktor kemudian ditukarkan kepada lapisan-lapisan grid untuk pemodelan hakisan tanah.

Kadar hakisan tanah didapati kurang daripada 1 t/h/yr di kebanyakan kawasan di tempat kajian. Kadar hakisan tanah yang didapati adalah dari 0 ke 2.255 t/ha/yr bagi W1, 0 ke 3.127 t/ha/r bagi W2, 0 ke 5.233 t/ha/yr bagi W3 dan 0 – 4.118 t/ha/yr bagi W5. Faktor LS dan R didapati amat mempengaruhi kadar hakisan tanah. Keputusan yang didapati juga adalah setanding dengan keputusan hakisan tanah yang diukur di petak hakisan dan yang diramal dengan USLE di kajian lain di bawah keadaan yang sama. Kebanyakan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa kadar hakisan tanah jarang melebihi 1 t/ha/yr di dalam kawasan hutan.

Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa, kadar hakisan tanah dapat dikira menggunakan USLE dalam satu persekitaran GIS. Penggunaan GIS adalah untuk memudahkan pengiraan kecerunan dan panjang kecerunan dengan kaedah automatik berdasarkan kepada penggunaan DEM. Ini telah dapat mengurangkan masa dan kos perbelanjaan bagi analisis serta pada masa yang sama memberikan satu tahap ketepatan yang diperlukan dalam meramal hakisan tanah. Kejayaan dalam pergabungan USLE dan GIS akan menjadi sesuatu yang amat berguna dalam kajian yang memerlukan kaedah penilaian hakisan tanah yang mudah dan tepat.

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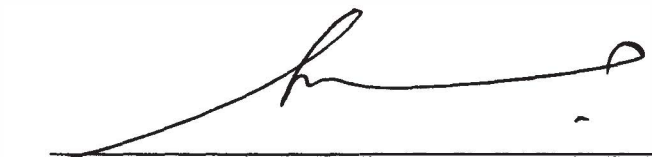
I certify that an Examination Committee met on 27th August 2002 to conduct the final examination of Albert Tan Thean Wei on his Master of Science thesis entitled “Application of Geographic Information System (GIS) in Soil Erosion Prediction: A Case Study of the Sg. Weng Experimental Watersheds” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledge. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.



Albert Tan Thean Wei

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|----------|
| ABSTRACT..... | ii |
| ABSTRAK..... | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | vi |
| APPROVAL..... | vii |
| DECLARATION..... | ix |
| LIST OF TABLES..... | xiii |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | xv |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS..... | xix |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1 INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 1.1 General..... | 1 |
| 1.2 Objectives of the Study..... | 4 |
| 2 LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 6 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 6 |
| 2.2 Definition of Soil Erosion..... | 6 |
| 2.2.1 Geological Erosion..... | 7 |
| 2.2.2 Accelerated Erosion..... | 7 |
| 2.3 Type of Erosion..... | 8 |
| 2.3.1 Rainsplash Erosion..... | 9 |
| 2.3.2 Sheet Wash..... | 9 |
| 2.3.3 Rill Erosion..... | 10 |
| 2.3.4 Gully Erosion..... | 11 |
| 2.3.5 Subsurface Erosion..... | 11 |
| 2.3.6 Mass Movement..... | 13 |
| 2.4 Distribution and Causes of Soil Erosion..... | 14 |
| 2.5 Erosion Models..... | 18 |
| 2.5.1 Type of Erosion Models..... | 19 |
| 2.6 Overview of Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE)..... | 26 |
| 2.6.1 Rainfall Erosivity Factor (R)..... | 27 |
| 2.6.2 Soil Erodibility Factor (K)..... | 31 |
| 2.6.3 Slope Length and Steepness Factor (LS)..... | 34 |
| 2.6.4 Crop and Management Factor (C)..... | 35 |
| 2.6.5 Support-Practice Factor (P)..... | 36 |
| 2.7 GIS in Soil Erosion Modeling..... | 38 |
| 2.7.1 Digital Thematic Maps..... | 39 |
| 2.7.2 GIS and Erosion Model Linkages..... | 40 |
| 2.7.3 A USLE-GIS Based Approach in Soil Erosion Evaluation..... | 42 |
| 2.8 Summary..... | 47 |



| | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 3 | MATERIALS AND METHODS..... | 49 |
| 3.1 | Introduction..... | 49 |
| 3.2 | Description of Study Area..... | 49 |
| 3.2.1 | Climate..... | 52 |
| 3.2.2 | Geology..... | 54 |
| 3.2.3 | Vegetation..... | 54 |
| 3.2.4 | Soil Characteristic..... | 55 |
| 3.3 | Data Acquisition..... | 59 |
| 3.3.1 | Base Map..... | 59 |
| 3.3.2 | Ancillary Data..... | 59 |
| 3.4 | Hardware and Software..... | 60 |
| 3.5 | Data Processing and Management..... | 62 |
| 3.5.1 | Designing Database..... | 62 |
| 3.5.2 | Data Automation..... | 63 |
| 3.5.3 | Data Rectification..... | 64 |
| 3.6 | Generating the LS Factor..... | 63 |
| 3.6.1 | Developing the Digital Elevation Model | 66 |
| 3.6.2 | Cumulative Downhill Slope Length AMLs..... | 67 |
| 3.6.3 | Grid-based Algorithm Description..... | 67 |
| 3.6.4 | Slope Classification..... | 70 |
| 3.7 | Universal Soil Loss Equation | 71 |
| 3.7.1 | Rainfall Factor (R)..... | 72 |
| 3.7.2 | Soil Erodibility Factor (K)..... | 75 |
| 3.7.3 | Vegetation Management (VM)..... | 76 |
| 3.8 | Soil Erosion Estimation..... | 79 |
| 3.9 | Summary..... | 79 |
| 4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION..... | 81 |
| 4.1 | Introduction..... | 81 |
| 4.2 | GIS Database..... | 81 |
| 4.2.1 | Digital Elevation Model..... | 86 |
| 4.3 | Basin Slope Classification..... | 91 |
| 4.4 | Rainfall Erosivity Factor (R)..... | 97 |
| 4.4.1 | Relationship between R Factor and Rainfall..... | 100 |
| 4.5 | Soil Series and Soil Erodibility Factor (K)..... | 101 |
| 4.6 | Length Slope Factor (LS)..... | 103 |
| 4.6.1 | Relationship between LS and Slope..... | 104 |
| 4.7 | Soil Erosion Rates..... | 114 |
| 4.7.1 | Erosion Classification..... | 110 |
| 4.7.2 | Relationship between Individual Factor and Computed Soil Erosion..... | 119 |
| 4.7.3 | Hypothetical Rainfalls in Erosion Estimation..... | 127 |
| 4.7.4 | Comparison of Soil Erosion Rates..... | 127 |
| 4.7.5 | Comparison of Soil Erosion Rates with Other Studies..... | 131 |
| 4.8 | Summary..... | 138 |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------|
| 5 | CONCLUSION | 140 |
| 5.1 | Introduction..... | 140 |
| 5.2 | Computation of Soil Erosion Rates..... | 140 |
| 5.3 | Recommendations..... | 143 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY | 144 |
| | VITA | 152 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| 2.1 Summary of erosion and sediment sources..... | 17 |
| 2.2 Summary of the differences between USLE and RUSLE | 20 |
| 2.3 Type of soil erosion models..... | 22 |
| 2.4 Conditions required for natural runoff plot and rainfall simulation plot | 32 |
| 2.5 C-factor values of the Universal Soil Loss Equation..... | 37 |
| 2.6 P-factor values of the Universal Soil Loss Equation | 38 |
| 2.7 GI | 45 |
| 3.1 Watershed characteristics of the Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed..... | 52 |
| 3.2 Mean monthly rainfall in Ulu Muda Forest Reserve, Baling Kedah (1990-1993)..... | 53 |
| 3.3 Forest type of Sg Weng Experimental Watershe..... | 55 |
| 3.4 Sources of data required..... | 59 |
| 3.5 Primary layers of Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed..... | 65 |
| 3.6 Slope classification of Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed..... | 70 |
| 3.7 Annual rainfall of Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed..... | 73 |
| 3.8 Annual rainfall with intensity equal and greater than 25mm/hr..... | 75 |
| 3.9 Soil erodibility factor, K (t.ha.h/ha/MJ/mm) of soil series of Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed..... | 75 |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 3.10 | Vegetation management factor (VM) of Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed..... | 76 |
| 4.1 | Slope distribution of study watersheds..... | 91 |
| 4.2 | Rainfall records of study watersheds for five year (1996 – 2000)... | 97 |
| 4.3 | Rainfall erosivity factor, R (MJ.mm/ha/h/yr) for study area based on four different methods for five years (1996 – 2000)..... | 99 |
| 4.4 | The erosive rainfall of the study watersheds (units in MJ.mm/ha/h/yr)..... | 100 |
| 4.5 | K (t.ha.h/ha/MJ/mm) distribution of study watersheds..... | 103 |
| 4.6 | LS distribution of the study watersheds..... | 104 |
| 4.7 | LS factor based on six slope classes..... | 105 |
| 4.8 | Slope length (m) distribution of study watersheds..... | 105 |
| 4.9 | Mean soil erosion rates (t/ha/yr) of study watersheds from 1996 to 2000 | 115 |
| 4.10 | Soil loss classification for study watersheds | 116 |
| 4.11 | Comparison of mean erosion for study area based on four different methods of determining the R factor..... | 129 |
| 4.12 | Comparison of soil erosion rates conducted in tropical forest..... | 132 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 2.1 Stages in the gully initiation..... | 12 |
| 2.2 Nomograph for computing K values (metric units) of soil erodibility for use in the Universal Soil Loss Equation..... | 34 |
| 3.1 Location of study site, Sg. Weng Experimental Watershed..... | 50 |
| 3.2 Map of study site..... | 51 |
| 3.3 Symington's (1943) altitudinal forest zones and Lai (1993) elevation of catchment studies in Peninsular Malaysia..... | 57 |
| 3.4 Soil series of study watershed..... | 58 |
| 3.5 HP Workstation running of UNIX operating system..... | 60 |
| 3.6 Digitizer table..... | 61 |
| 3.7 Digitizer..... | 61 |
| 3.8 Steps in building database..... | 62 |
| 3.9 Combined steps in building the database using ARC/INFO software..... | 65 |
| 3.10 Flowchart illustrating the process for calculating LS values from DEM..... | 68 |
| 3.11 Graph for determining VM sub-factor..... | 77 |
| 3.12 Guide for estimating density of bare soil, canopy and fine roots..... | 78 |
| 3.13 Summary of the complete process in the methodology of the study..... | 80 |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 4.1 | Topographic features and attribute tables of W1..... | 82 |
| 4.2 | Topographic features and attribute tables of W2..... | 83 |
| 4.3 | Topographic features and attribute tables of W3..... | 84 |
| 4.4 | Topographic features and attribute tables of W5..... | 85 |
| 4.5 | DEM of W1..... | 88 |
| 4.6 | DEM of W2..... | 88 |
| 4.7 | DEM of W3..... | 89 |
| 4.8 | DEM of W5..... | 89 |
| 4.9 | A 3D-perspective of elevation of study watersheds..... | 90 |
| 4.10 | Grid map representing slope classification of W1..... | 92 |
| 4.11 | Grid map representing slope classification of W2..... | 93 |
| 4.12 | Grid map representing slope classification of W3..... | 94 |
| 4.13 | Grid map representing slope classification of W5..... | 95 |
| 4.14 | A 3D-perspective of slope of study watersheds..... | 96 |
| 4.15 | Relationship between annual rainfall and R factor..... | 101 |
| 4.16 | Relationship between slope (a), slope length (b) and calculated LS in W1..... | 106 |
| 4.17 | Relationship between slope (a), slope length (b) and calculated LS in W2..... | 107 |
| 4.18 | Relationship between slope (a), slope length (b) and calculated LS in W3..... | 108 |
| 4.19 | Relationship between slope (a), slope length (b) and calculated LS in W5..... | 109 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 4.20 | LS factor of W1..... | 110 |
| 4.21 | LS factor of W2..... | 111 |
| 4.22 | LS factor of W3..... | 112 |
| 4.23 | LS factor of W5..... | 113 |
| 4.24 | Percentage area for five erosion classes in W1..... | 117 |
| 4.25 | Percentage area for five erosion classes in W2..... | 117 |
| 4.26 | Percentage area for five erosion classes in W3..... | 118 |
| 4.27 | Percentage area for five erosion classes in W5..... | 118 |
| 4.28 | Relationship between annual rainfall (a), R factor (b) and soil erosion in W1..... | 120 |
| 4.29 | Relationship between annual rainfall (a), R factor (b) and soil erosion in W2..... | 121 |
| 4.30 | Relationship between annual rainfall (a), R factor (b) and soil erosion in W3..... | 122 |
| 4.31 | Relationship between annual rainfall (a), R factor (b) and soil erosion in W5..... | 123 |
| 4.32 | Relationship between LS factor and soil erosion rates in W1..... | 125 |
| 4.33 | Relationship between LS factor and soil erosion rates in W2..... | 125 |
| 4.34 | Relationship between LS factor and soil erosion rates in W3..... | 126 |
| 4.35 | Relationship between LS factor and soil erosion rates in W5..... | 126 |
| 4.36 | Soil erosion rates based on hypothetical annual rainfall in W1..... | 128 |
| 4.37 | Soil erosion rates based on hypothetical annual rainfall in W2..... | 128 |
| 4.38 | Soil erosion rates based on hypothetical annual rainfall in W3..... | 129 |
| 4.39 | Soil erosion rates based on hypothetical annual rainfall in W5..... | 129 |

| | | |
|------|-------------------------------|-----|
| 4.40 | Soil erosion rates of W1..... | 134 |
| 4.41 | Soil erosion rates of W2..... | 135 |
| 4.42 | Soil erosion rates of W3..... | 136 |
| 4.43 | Soil erosion rates of W5..... | 137 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| GIS | Geographic Information System |
| DEM | Digital Elevation Model |
| TIN | Triangular Irregular Network |
| W1 | Watershed 1 |
| W2 | Watershed 2 |
| W3 | Watershed 3 |
| W5 | Watershed 5 |
| DID | Drainage and Irrigation Department |
| USLE | Universal Soil Loss Equation |
| MSLE | Modified Soil Loss Equation |
| MUSLE | Modified Universal Soil Loss Equation |
| RUSLE | Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation |
| WEPP | Water Erosion Prediction Project |
| CREAMS | Chemicals, Runoff and Erosion from Agricultural Management Systems |
| GUESS | Griffith University Erosion Sedimentation System |
| EUROSEM | European Soil Erosion Model |
| LISEM | Limburg Soil Erosion Model |
| GRASS | Geographical Resource Analysis Support System |
| ILWIS | Integrated Land and Watershed Management Information Systems |
| ERDAS | Earth Resource Data Analysis System |
| AML | Arc Macro Language |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

The rapid process of soil erosion is considered one of the most critical environmental problems facing our world today. Currently, it is widely recognized as a serious global problem. This phenomenon is caused by the immense pressure on land due to rapid development and population growth. In order to cope with this demand, vast areas of forest have been cleared. Much of the forested land in the world today has already been lost and is being replaced by agriculture, highway construction, urban development, housing and other land use activities. The consequences of these activities have resulted in accelerated erosion which has affected large areas of the earth.

The growing concern among relevant authorities, scientists, environmentalist and those affected by various land use changes has created the need for assessing the magnitude of erosion and how much of it has exceeds the acceptable tolerance limits. Based on the assessment of soil loss, different possible combinations of land use and management practices can be determined so that soil loss can be reduced and maintained within the prescribed limit. Before planning conservation work, it is helpful if the assessment can be transformed into a statement on how fast the land is being eroded. Therefore, what is required is a method of predicting soil loss under a wide range of conditions.

Basic mathematical models that combine fundamental principles, concept and relationships of erosion mechanics, hydrology, hydraulics, soil science and meteorology are effective tools for estimating soil loss. Various soil erosion models have been developed ranging from the lumped or empirical models which uses simple equation to the more advanced and complex models that use mathematical equations to describe the spatial and temporal distribution of mechanisms controlling erosion. These models can be used as a predictive tool for assessing soil erosion because through these models, conservation planner can determine how much, when and where the erosion is occurring. Through these models also, they will have better understanding of the erosion processes and their interactions before effective control program for soil conservation can be designed and implemented.

In recent years, Geographic Information System (GIS) has become an important and useful tool for handling spatial data. GIS can capture, store, manipulate, analyze, and display spatially referenced information which allows the development of spatial databases. These databases can be accessed, modified and updated in the future in line with the changing environment and situations. Since so much erosion is linked to the processes of the earth's surface, technology such as GIS can be integrated with many erosion and watershed models whereby the spatial phenomena (such as topography, soil, crop management and climate) can be handled in significantly improved fashion. GIS offers spatial data management and analysis tools that can assist experienced and skillful users in organizing, storing, editing, analyzing, and displaying spatial information.

The use of GIS in soil erosion assessment can be seen at various scales ranging from generation of thematic maps showing current or susceptible areas of erosion to development of spatial decision support system through the integration between GIS and soil erosion models. Combining the strengths of each will result in more powerful predictive and analytical tools in terms of efficiency, speed and accuracy of simulation results. GIS can also reduce the time and money invested in establishing a database system that can be used to support planning and monitoring.

1.2 Problem statement

This study attempts at watershed soil erosion assessment using Geographic Information System (GIS). In the study of erosion, it has been found that most of the physically based models (eg. WEPP, GRASS, CREAMS and others) from developed countries are not suitable for local use due to different environment conditions and data availability. These models are complex and may present difficulties for use. Mainly for this reason, this study adopts the Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) in estimating the soil erosion rates because of its simplicity and parameters are more easily available although some modifications can be made to adapt to local conditions. The simple form of the equation also makes it easier to be integrated within the GIS environment. Previously the slope length of the USLE is estimated rather than calculated for large areas. The use of GIS is also to facilitate the calculation of the slope and the length slope factor for use in the USLE so that the landscape will be more accurately described and erosion estimates will approach actual values.

In addition, earlier attempts at estimating soil erosion using USLE and more recently, with GIS, had been made. These studies (eg. Lok *et al.* (1991) in Upper Klang Valley, Roslan & Tiew (1996) in Cameron Highlands, Kamaruzaman *et al.* (1999) in Langkawi and others) had been successful in generating soil erosion information although some limitation such as methods of determining the parameters, quality of the data and reliability of the results were also addressed. This study attempts to consider these limitations with the aim to predict more accurately watershed erosion.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to determine soil loss under forest conditions in the Sg. Weng Experimental watersheds using the Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) in combination with Geographic Information System (GIS) to generate digital soil erosion information.

The specific objectives of this study are: -

- i. To determine the slope length factor (LS) of the USLE equation using a digital elevation model (DEM).
- ii. To determine the other component of USLE (rainfall erosivity factor (R), soil erodibility factor (K), crop management (C) and support practice factor (P)) for conversion to digital or raster format.
- iii. To estimate the soil erosion rates of the study watersheds under primary forest and thus generating digital soil erosion map.

It is envisaged that reasonable information on the soil erosion rates could be reasonably generated in this study and the method used in this study could be applied to other areas with similar conditions in order to assess the magnitude of soil loss. Furthermore, the information obtained will be valuable resources for decision makers to guard against land disturbances in high erosion risk areas.